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CHILDREN OF MARY

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Tales of Foreign Lands.

A Series of Stories for the Young.

COLLECTED BY

REV. JOSEPH SPILLMANN, S. J.

VOL. III.

CHILDREN OF MARY.

ST. LOUIS, MO. 1896.
Published by B. HERDER,
17 South Broadway.

CHILDREN OF MARY.

A TALE OF THE CAUCASUS.

BY

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Translated from the German

BY

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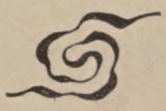

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—BECKTOLD—
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CHILDREN OF MARY.

I.

The Departure.

Between the Black Sea and the Caspian the gigantic range of the Caucasus rises up above the clouds and forms the natural boundary between Europe and Asia. Its two highest snow-capped peaks, Elbruz and Kasbec, are well named, for Elbruz means, 'the Shining,' and Kasbec, the 'White mountain,' and both exceed Mont Blanc in height. Travellers well-acquainted with mountainous countries, have observed the striking resemblance which exists between the Caucasian range and the wildest and grandest regions of the Swiss Tyrolean Alps. And the brave character, and great love of freedom, usually possessed by the sons of the mountains, are also to be found amongst the inhabitants of the Caucasus. For nearly a century the Caucasian races struggled for their liberty against Russian supremacy. It

cost the Czar the lives of half a million brave soldiers to reduce them to subjection! And he did not subdue them but simply crushed them by overwhelming numbers.

We will tell our young friends a tale about the last years of this struggle, in which fact and fiction are intermixed.

From the wave-beaten rocky shores of the Black Sea, the mountains rise in steep declivities to the first range. Impenetrable forests of wild fig trees, primeval chestnuts, wide-branching planes, and other trees, intermingled with thick underwood, prickly acacias, cactuses, and tall ferns, form a thicket barrier through which but few paths lead. Then follows the first high valley and the mountains rise up again in ever increasing wildness of form to higher and higher chains and ridges.

Here the oak and elm and other leaf-producing trees no longer grow; but in their place gigantic pine and fir trees of immense age are found. The torrents rush foaming down over the rocky-walls and through wildernesses of stone; and their steep, slanting beds afford almost the only approach to the high-lying pasture lands of

the Abkasians. For, strange as it may seem, in the very heart of the Caucasus, hemmed in by rock and forest, are found rich meadows and pasture lands watered by clear streams, and beautiful in the rich freshness of their verdure. In the rich pastures the flocks of the Abkasians graze. On the precipices, in places protected from the cold icy winds which blow from steep Elbruz, and from the western hurricanes which sweep over the Black Sea, the hardy Abkasian people build their habitations. Each family has its own homestead which is called a "juneh." A high strongly-twisted hurdle-fence, with prickly thorn bushes fastened on the top shuts in a spacious court. The centre is unoccupied. Along one side of the enclosure stand the huts; the other side serves as stabling for the horned cattle and as a fold for sheep and goats. In the middle of the huts is the *Junehschuha*, (great house) where the father of the family lives with his wife and the children who are under twelve years of age. The grown-up sons and daughters, as well as the slaves with their families, have their own particular huts; but all belong to the

same homestead. Thus it may happen that a Juneh numbers more than a hundred inhabitants, and looks with its many dwellings, stables and storehouses almost like a village.

The homestead of the *Tfokol* (Franklin) Usban-ok of the Köble tribe, in which the scene of our story is partly laid, was a homestead, such as that which I have described, and it contained more than a hundred souls. It was situated in one of those mountain valleys we have just been speaking of. The huts were backed by a high precipice overgrown with ivy; and, in front of the enclosure stretched a broad green mountain-meadow, through which a rushing stream, which had its source amid the rocks hurried along over its pebbly course.

One evening in the early spring of the year 1860, a boy had just been merrily singing and calling his flocks to this stream to drink, when suddenly his lively song ceased as three horsemen sprang off their noble steeds on to the field path. The boy, greatly astonished, looked with wonder at the rich clothing and the bright bejewelled weapons of the warriors. "These are no

ordinary *Tfokol*," (Franklins) said the boy to himself. "They must be knights or princes. How their sabres sparkle with gold and precious stones. Even my father's weapons are not so handsome as these!"

"Halloa! little man! Is the *Tfokol* Usbanok in his homestead?" asked the foremost horseman as he sprang from the saddle.

"My father," said the boy, folding his hands over his breast and bowing low, "is in the homestead, Prince. Will you ride there to him, or shall I go and call him?"

"What a polite little boy you are! What is your name? and how do you know that I am a prince?" enquired the horseman, stroking his long brown beard.

"Marjub is the name of your humble servant, and he knows that you are a prince by the splendor of your weapons."

"You are a clever boy, Marjub, and if you fight bravely against the Russians some day you shall have just such beautiful weapons as these I bear. Go now and call your father."

Marjub bowed and said: "O Prince, how I wish I was as big as my brother Malek and could go to fight the Russians!—"

Then he added: "I will go to the homestead now, but, please, be so kind as to tell your companions to look after my cows in the meantime; for the yellow one is vicious, and has run away into the wood more than once."

The horsemen laughed at the simple request, but the prince assured the boy that he would himself keep the yellow cow well in sight. So Marjub hastened to the homestead. In a few minutes old Usban-ok stood before the prince.

"Pardon me, Usban-ok, for not entering your house as a guest," said the prince. "Time presses. We must get over the pass to the tribe of the Mokotch to-day. News has been received from the Ossets, that the Russians are advancing from Tiflis to the Kasbec Pass in force with cannon and materials of war. I think we shall trap them in the ravine between the two passes. But we must ride as fast as the horses can carry us to get there in time. You will join us, brave Usban-ok? How many men can your homestead furnish?"

"Thirty-five, well-armed and well-disciplined warriors," answered Usban-ok

proudly. "None shall remain behind except Mahmud, the armorer, who must repair the Russian arms which have been captured. But we are out of powder."

"We will get powder from the Russians themselves," said the prince. "So have the horses saddled at once. The great fir tree by the Iba brook is the rendezvous." With these words the horsemen galloped off waving their hands in adieu.

Usban-ok drew a pistol from his girdle and discharged it. Then he gave a peculiar, long-drawn cry — the signal which summoned the Abkasians to battle. It was scarcely half an hour before all the inhabitants of the huts and from the hill tops were assembled in presence of their chieftain. Usban-ok stood by the side of his noble high-spirited steed already saddled. He had girded on his scimetar, the handle and sheath of which were richly ornamented. He had also a pair of pistols and a long dagger stuck in his belt. Across his shoulders he had slung a light musket, whilst a formidable battle-axe hung from the horse's saddle. His ivory cartridge box was well supplied. When he saw his sons and servants gathered

together, he drew his gleaming sword — looked around him with flashing eyes, and said:

"My sons and people of my Juneh! The war-cry has sounded on our mountains again. It is the old enemy, the Russian bear, who covets our beautiful lands, our fat flocks and rich honeycombs. Already several times have our bees so covered him with stings that he has packed off on his way howling with rage and pain. And now we will receive him again with stings more painful still and avenge the evil which he brought upon our brothers in the east — the noble Sheik Shamyl and his followers. Let us rather die than bend our necks beneath the Russian yoke! What business have they in these our mountains which have belonged to our race and to our ancestors for so many generations? We covet not the lands of the Czar — then let him leave us our homes in peace. For three quarters of a century he has been fighting against us — he has murdered our sons and fathers, and kidnapped our wives and children. He desires to wrench from us the very earth on which we stand. Let us avenge ourselves for all the

blood which has been spilled — for all the tears which have been shed, and show the shameless robbers of what tribe we are. Remember how we defended ourselves when the Turks strove to force their dominion and their faith upon us. Their faith!! it is bad indeed but the faith of the Russians is still worse! Were it not so, how could they think of waging such an unjust war! We will maintain and keep alive the ancient faith of our fathers — faith in the great Tha (God); and in Jesha (Jesus) the son of the great Tha; and in the holy cross that he bore; and in the blessed Mara, the Mother of God; and in the mountain churches, which the Moslems — May God punish them for it! — destroyed; and in the feasts and fasts. That is our creed, and we will not change it for any other — be it Turkish, or Christian! And we will conquer or die for our freedom and for our homes, and for our native land!" "Victory or death!" repeated the warriors enthusiastically, and the naked swords gleamed bright in the rays of the setting sun.

"Good-bye to you, my children, and maid servants. I leave you under the protection

of old Murkos who will rule and govern in my stead till my return. Don't cry, my little Mara! Your mother never wept when I went forth to the holy wars. And you, Marjub, my brave boy, don't cry!"

"No, father! How I wish I could go with you to load your gun!"

"Next time, my boy, when you are bigger." With these words the father pressed his boy to his bosom, and tenderly kissed his little Mara. Then greybearded as he was, he leaped nimbly as a young man into the saddle, "Good-bye!" he called out again and again as he galloped off amidst the cracking of whips and the loud shouting of the troop of horsemen.

"Good-bye!" was echoed back from those who remained behind and stood looking after them until the last man had disappeared in the dark woods.

Then little Mara said to her brother: "Marjub, we can still see them from the top of the rock." Hand in hand the children went towards the rocky wall, which overshadowed the homestead, and mounted the steps. From the summit of the rock a glorious view of east and west lay stretched

before them. Over the wooded-hill-tops a portion of the Black Sea was visible; and the crimson light of the setting sun seemed to have set on fire its rolling billows. In the east the icy summits of Elbruz and the neighboring mountains shone above the dark fir woods like molten gold.

The two children stood for a while silently looking towards the mountain chain through which a pass led to the valley beyond. "There they are!" they suddenly exclaimed and waved their hands. "Father is looking and Malek is waving his hand—Good-bye! Good-bye!"

When the white garments of the warriors had disappeared in the mountain fastnesses, the children seated themselves on a block of stone and remained for a time silently gazing into the depths below. At length little Mara said to her brother:

"Marjub, if the wicked Russians were to kill father we should be poor orphan children, for we have lost our dear mother already."

"They won't kill him, Mara, but father will kill them. His gun carries far; and he

aims true; and with his battle-axe he will slay them. Besides our brother Malek will protect him."

"Ah, Marjub, our cousin, the great Gori, was also strong and brave but yet he fell in the last battle. — Do you remember what mother used often to tell us about blessed Mara? The Mother of God dwells in Heaven, it is true, whither she went up on beautiful red clouds like those floating over the sea. But she often comes down to earth again, and wanders about amongst men. And when she finds any good children who love and honor her, she blesses them and preserves them from all harm. O, Marjub, don't you hear a soft murmuring sound in the brushwood where all was quiet just now? Who knows, perhaps the great Mara is passing unseen over us. Come, we will pray to her!"

The children knelt down, raised up their hands towards the glowing sky, and the little maiden thus prayed: "O, Mara, Great Tha Nan (Mother of God) if you are passing by on yonder golden cloud, and can hear our voices; protect our father and brother and all our people!"

"Obtain for them victory and glory and be as a shield to them in battle!" added the boy.

"Protect us also!" said the little girl in conclusion. "And as we no longer have our mother, be thyself our mother and look on us as thy children!"

Thus prayed Mara and Marjub, and the Blessed Virgin, of whom they had only a vague and confused idea, graciously heard their simple prayers.

II.

In the Russian Camp.

In the spring of 1860 the Russians armed themselves for the last decisive battle. Prince Barjatinski, at the head of 270,000 men, had already reduced the eastern tribes of the Caucasus to subjection. In September 1859 Sheik Shamyl, who for 30 years had defended his native place with a small troop of his faithful followers, was surrounded and taken prisoner on the summit of Mount Ghunib, and the Russians could now throw themselves with their overpowering numbers on the peoples of the western Caucasus. They held the mountain beleaguered like a fortress and drew reinforcements from all sides for this last assault. It is noteworthy that many Polish troops were constrained to shed their blood in this unjust and cruel war.

The snow had hardly melted away when all the paths which lead into the mountain became alive with soldiers. In dark long-stretching winding lines the infantry as-

cended to the green upper valleys, and swarmed over the heights of the first range of hills. Accompanying them came artillery wagons, ammunition and baggage. Cossacks from the Don with their long spears galloped up and down between the different columns.

When twilight was coming on, after a hard day's march, a young Russian officer with his soldiers encamped on the road from Tiflis to the Kasbec Pass. The troops were from Grecian and a company of Polish exiles was also with them. The men had just hung their kettles on the poles and lighted the fires when a Donscher Cossack came galloping up and handed a note to the officer. The young man read it, and cast an anxious glance on the broad stream, swollen by the melted snow; then on his right, and on the steep woody declivities which reached down nearly to the road on the left. Then he called a non-commissioned officer and said to the weather-beaten soldier, who stood before him and gave the military salute:

"Iwan Iwanowitch, the colonel thinks there may be some Abkasians in front of us in the wood."

"Very likely, your Honor," answered the old grey beard. "Perhaps also on our right and on our left, and in our rear. When we went up by the Terek river last year, we were caught by those devilish heathens in a hollow which was as much like this one as two peas in a pod, and we were—"

"Cut to pieces! I know all about that," said the officer interrupting the garrulous old man. "And that that may not happen a second time, we will post double sentries and secure a safe position for our night bivouac."

"All very good! But, excuse me, where shall we get a safe place in this mountain valley? And, as for double sentries," the non-commissioned officer went on to say, "half of our troops are Poles, who are as ill-affected towards our gracious Czar—May God protect him from all his enemies! — as these heathenish mountain devils themselves."

The officer looked concerned, and, after a moment's thought, said: "You don't think, they would desert their colors before the enemy do you?"

"I saw them down at Kuban run over to the Abkasians in hundreds, and even now scores of them are fighting in the ranks of those mountain devils.—It is true there was no mention made of that at St. Petersburg; and, often as we had to run away, there was nothing but glorious victories to be read of in our papers."

"And what is your opinion now?"

"In my opinion, we are lost, given up to the knife, and shall be cut to pieces, if only a couple of hundred Abkasians are hidden behind those trees. They will block up the narrow pass which we came through half an hour ago. Three miles further up our way lies between the stream and walls of rock. There they will stop us too. And so they have us in a trap, and can shoot us from behind the trees and rocks with as much safety to themselves, as we enjoy when we shoot at the target on Sunday afternoons. And they know how to use their muskets, as true as my name is Iwan Iwanowitch."

The officer turned rather pale; he had come fresh from the military academy and had never yet been in an engagement. The thought flashed through his mind how easily,

instead of a soldier's long and glorious career, a ball from the enemy might put an end to his existence in this very first encounter. Then he said to old Iwan: "What a foreboder of ill you are! What can be done to make your prophecies turn out false?"

"Go back, your Honor, out of the trap, whilst there is time. There is a hill below the narrow defile which might afford us tolerably safe quarters for the night.—"

"Are you mad, fellow!" said the officer interrupting the old soldier impatiently. "Go back, before we have even seen the enemy and give up the narrow defile again which we so successfully passed through!—I would never dream of that! Better to go on and get through the next pass before night closes in."

"The sun is already set, your Honor, and we may be cut off from the troops behind us," Iwan ventured to remonstrate.

"Our Don Cossacks must keep up the communications; so, forward! Before night is far advanced we must have left the next narrow defile behind our backs."

III.

The Young Pole.

Old Iwan Iwanowitch did not venture to make any further objections, and so the order to advance was given forthwith. The tired soldiers arose angrily from around the camp fires, and throwing away the water which was just beginning to warm, gathered their cooking utensils together and hastily fell into rank. The officer, who noticed the discontented looks of some of the men, and particularly of the Polish soldiers, ordered them to the front, and called out most injudiciously: "What is the meaning of these sullen looks? You were sent here as a punishment for the treasonable intrigues with which your heads are filled. Do you want to go 300 miles further on, to Siberia, that Paradise of the Poles? Perecinski, why are you frowning so? You shall have five and twenty lashes with the knout meted out to you to-morrow at bugle call. Iwanowitch, don't forget it. And now, forward!"

In close order and with rapid steps they marched on towards the ravine. Some Cossacks rode on in front to see whether the narrow pass was free. The sun had gone down, and in the narrow mountain valley, night was fast coming on. They were still a good distance from the upper defile, when it became quite dark. But all was quiet around; only the stream struggled with the boulders between which the snow-water rushed foaming on. A Cossack rode back and announced that the pass was unoccupied. "I thought so," said the officer; "it was a false alarm." And he gave the order to halt. The soldiers lay down in the open, and fires were soon alight, and the red glare illumined the woods on the left, and the rugged wild rocks on the right. A strong guard of Poles and Grecians, under the command of old Iwanowitch, was posted to watch the pass.

"Keep good watch for me to-night, boys," said he to the Grecians. "It is not very safe in these mountains; and should any of those Poles turn traitor, thrust your bayonet through him!"

"All right," answered a stallwart Grecian.

"If one of those Polish dogs, who worship the Pope instead of obeying our holy Czar, dare to raise so much as his little finger against us he shall die!"

The guard was stationed. The young Pole whom the officer had threatened with the knout, was posted close to the wood with one of his countrymen and a Grecian, who declared his determination to punish with instant death any act of treason. Not a hundred paces further on, old Iwanowitch lay down before a camp fire, resolved to keep the Poles, whom he could not trust, well in view. After an uneventful quarter of an hour, the Grecian sat down, and leaning his back against a tree, dozed off, and soon his loud snoring made known that he was fast asleep.

"A fine guard!" whispered young Perecinski to his companion. "At all events I am glad he is asleep, for I have something to say to you."

"Hush," answered the other. "Are you quite sure that he is not pretending? And remember that old greybeard, Iwanowitch, will not take his eyes off you."

"Well, at all events, *one* does not under-

stand Polish, and the other is far enough away. Besides, the noise of the stream will drown the sound of our whispering. — I tell you, I have no desire to wait for the strokes of the knout to-morrow, and I am determined to go over to the Abkasians this very night!"

"What! will you go over to the enemy?"

"Say rather to friends. What harm have these poor, brave mountaineers done to us that we should call them our enemies? I call those enemies, who would enslave them, as they long ago enslaved our poor countrymen."

"Do you want to go to the gallows, or to Siberia, with your imprudent talk? If you value your life, be silent!" answered his old friend softly. "You are standing now under the flag of the Czar — and you cannot swim against the stream."

"But my conscience forbids me to fight for the Czar in an unjust war. — I will not take a single aim against the Abkasians, and I will seize the first opportunity to fight on their side."

"Are you mad? Have you not heard that the Czar wants to reduce the Abkasians and

the other Caucasian tribes to submission, and sell their children to the Turks for slaves, because they are heathens?"

"If he had their conversion at heart, he would have sent out missionaries to them. But I saw in Tiflis the convent out of which General Gurko drove (by command of the Czar) the venerable Capuchin fathers, who wanted to preach the Lord Jesus to the people. And still more recently the Russians expelled the Jesuits who had worked for so many years for the conversion of this very tribe. And, as for slavery, I doubt whether the fate of the poor creatures can be as bad as that of our own countrymen in the mines of Siberia."

"Unless you want to find yourself condemned to those very mines within the next three months, be silent, I tell you again. And before you go over to the Abkasians, consider well that their's is a forlorn hope, and that you will be shot, or hung up to the nearest tree, if you fall into the hands of the Russians alive. Then think of your poor old mother, who is counting the days, in her little cottage on the Vistula, till your

service is over, and she may hope to see you home again."

"My dear mother!" answered the youth. "Thanks, Ladislaus, for your well-meant reminder. And yet I dare not act against my conscience, come what may. May the Blessed Virgin protect me, and lead me back to be a comfort to my poor mother in her old age! And she will do so. Last year my mother went on a pilgrimage to Ezenstochan and every evening she prayed there before the picture of our Blessed Lady, for my welfare. And do you know what she dreamed the night before I had to go to Moscow? She dreamed she saw me in the midst of children in the flames of a burning house; and it seemed as if no escape was possible. But neither the children nor I perceived the danger, and I was calmly teaching them to say the Ave Maria, when lo! there appeared over the burning dwelling the picture from Ezenstochan; and a soft rain trickled down from it on to the fire. And just as the children were saying: 'In the the hour of our death. Amen.' the flames were extinguished. My mother interpreted it as a proof that the Blessed Virgin would save

me, and the children who were with me, from danger of death."

"That was a wonderful dream," answered the old Pole. "May it portend good luck to you! But hark! What is that?—I thought I heard something in front of us in the wood, just now."

They both listened for a moment holding their breath — and they distinctly heard a branch crackle under somebody's foot. They seized their muskets, and the old Pole was just going to cry: "Who goes there?" when a low voice out of the bushes immediately in front of them said in Polish: "Fellow countrymen, I have overheard the whole of your conversation. Come with me quickly into the sheltering thicket, or you will be too late. Your troops are surrounded on every side."

"Come on, comrade!" whispered Perecinski, this is the hand of Providence." And he tried to draw his friend away with him. But he had scarcely taken the first step towards the wood, when there was a shot, and, with a cry of agony, the young Pole fell to the ground. His friend, passed whose head the ball had whizzed, looked

round, and saw in the moonlight old Iwanowitch with a still smoking rifle coming towards them from the encampment. Gnashing his teeth, he aimed at the Russian who had struck his friend down. But as he was about to pull the trigger, he felt himself seized by strong arms from behind and firmly held by the Grecian, whom the report of the gun had awakened. A life and death struggle ensued. The old Russian was about to make use of his sword, when a sharp report was heard, followed by a flash—and Iwanowitch fell to the ground. Then followed a blaze of musketry. From this side and from that, along the edge of the wood and from the rocks on the other side of the stream, above the din of battle, rose the wild war-cry of the Abkasians. For a moment the Russian officer tried to rally his troops. But exposed in the open to the deadly aim of their foes, the soldiers could not stand against their murderous fire. And, deaf to the commands and entreaties of their officer, they sought safety in precipitous flight. But finding all chance of retreat cut off, they threw down their arms and surrendered to the enemy. The Abka-

sians burst forth from the shelter of the woods to seize their prisoners and to capture the rich booty of arms and ammunition. Then their leader held a review of his victorious troops.

"Has anyone belonging to our Juneh been wounded or fallen in the battle?" asked Usban-ok; for it was he who led the attack of the vanguard.

"Not one," was the answer.

"Thanks be to the Tha-Nan! (Mother of God) We will make her a rich thankoffering. Malek, convey the booty to the Juneh. Those of the prisoners who are willing to fight against the common enemy shall be treated as our own people; those who will not do so, shall be escorted to the upper valleys and condemned to work."

"Yonder lies a young wounded Pole who was just coming over to us of his own accord, when a ball struck him," said one of the warriors.

"Take him with you to the Juneh, if he can ride, and nurse him there as a brother, Malek. We must hasten to intercept the main body of the Russian army, which the prince will meet at our narrow defile. Long live freedom! Death to the Russians!"

IV.

The Superstition of the Abkasians.

Day after day, from the commanding height, Marjub and Mara had kept a patient look-out, watching for the victorious return of their father and brother. Suddenly in the distance they saw Malek at the head of a troop coming back to the valley. Joyfully the children climbed down the rocks and hastened to meet their brother!

"Where is father?" cried Marjub.

"At the war; he is all right; and he sends his love to you. He is gone with the prince to oppose the Russian forces, having taken their vanguard by surprise."

"And you have let father go alone to battle, and come back home? Marjub would not have done that!" said the younger brother reproachfully.

"Marjub would have done just the same, if his father had ordered him; for he is an obedient child—" answered Malek laughing. "But I do not know whether father would have trusted him with the duty of bringing the

rich booty home—several hundreds of rifles, swords, cartridge-boxes; besides fifty barrels of powder and a hundred prisoners."

"Don't be angry with each other at your first meeting," said little Mara. "But tell us if any one belonging to our Juneh has been killed or wounded by the wicked Russians."

"No, darling, not one franklin nor one servant. The great Tha-Nan protected us. But there is a young Pole whom the enemy shot in the shoulder, just as he was coming over to us to join us in fighting against the Russians who enslaved his country also. You and old Fatmeh must nurse him well, so that he may soon be able to join us; for I have taken a great liking to him."

"I will gather some of the best herbs and put them on his wounds. Is that pale youth there on the white horse he? Come, Malek, let us help him out of the saddle, and take him to the Juneh. Or better still, Marjub, you help your brother, and I will run and get ready a comfortable bed for the poor man."

Perecinski was taken to one of the guest huts of the Juneh, and soon recovered from

his wounds under the care of old Fatmeh. Marjub and Mara often sat by his bedside. Very soon the young Pole had learnt from the children sufficient of their language to be able to converse with them. One evening, when he was sitting with them outside the hut, looking at the setting sun, he asked them if they knew who made that beautiful light in the heavens, and the meadows, and the woods, and the mountains all round?

"Tha (God) made them," said the children. "Yes, and I think, Tha-Nan (God's mother) helped him do it," added Marjub.

"No, children, the Mother of God did not exist when God created the world."

"I can't believe that," said Mara, "for Tha-Nan is his mother."

"She is the mother of the Son of God, but not of the Heavenly Father. Have you never heard of Jesus, whom the Mother of God gave birth to in a stable at Bethlehem, and laid in a manger?"

"We have heard of Jesus; he carried the holy cross which we adore. But nobody ever told us anything about the stable and the manger. And father says, it is not certain whether Mara — Tha-Nan, is the

mother of Tharok (God's son) or of Tha (God) himself. If you know, please, tell us."

The Pole was astounded at the ignorance of those good children. He thought of his mother's dream, and resolved to instruct them in the faith. "Whom do you worship then, when you lift up your hands to Heaven, as I saw you doing yesterday up there on the top of the rock?"

"We were worshiping the Mother of God, who is also our mother," answered Mara.

"But you must not worship the Mother of God. God alone must be worshiped. You may ask her to intercede with God for you; and you may love and honor her. Adoration is due only to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost — the Holy Trinity in whose name we are baptized. Have you been baptized?"

The children looked with astonishment at the Pole and said: "We don't know what you mean. What is it to be baptized!"

"So you are not even Christians? Have you no priests then?"

"No, we are not Christians. The Russians are Christians," cried Marjub. "We are children of the great Tha, and of the great

Mother of God. But we have priests: old Marjom in the oak valley is the priest of the Juneh. You will see him next month when he offers sacrifice at the feast of the great Tha-Nan."

"That is the Mother of God's greatest feast," said Mara, clapping her hands for joy. "She comes down from heaven to earth and visits her children, and takes part in the feast, and blesses all the good people. But nobody sees her."

Perecinski wondered very much at the children's words. He thought to himself, the Abkasians must evidently have been Christians at one time, and, in the course of ages, have distorted and almost lost the faith, being surrounded by Mahometans, and cut off for hundreds of years, from all intercourse with the Christians of the west.

And it was so. On the southern slopes of the Caucasus, in Georgia, sprang up soon after the apostolic times several Christian communities. To the tribes of the north and west, and of the inner valleys, the faith only penetrated later; and it had not yet taken firm root, when the Turks over-ran Georgia and prevented its growth. The

Abkasians appear to have had the faith preached to them by Italian missionaries. Merchants from Genoa certainly traded with the Crimea, and came in contact with the tribes on the river Kuban, and even up to the Caspian Sea. So it came to pass that amongst the Abkasians the Latin cross, with the perpendicular beam (†) was in use, and not the Greek equal-armed (✢). When the Turks captured Constantinople the western lands were cut off from the Caucasus; and as no missionaries could confirm the newly-converted people in their faith, the old superstitions sprang up again, and gradually chocked the good seed sown by the Christians. Distorted remnants of the ancient rites and ceremonies were kept up. The veneration of the cross and of the Blessed Virgin was changed into an idolatrous practice; and, instead of the one God, some tribes even adored the old heathen deities of the forests, mountains and rivers.

The young Pole, soon after the conversation with Marjub and Mara, gained from witnessing the sacrificial feast, a still deeper conviction of the intermingling of Christian and heathenish customs, as observed by

the Abkasians. In the beginning of July Usban-ok, with Malek and the other warriors of the Juneh, returned victorious from the expedition against the Russians. He had succeeded in several skirmishes, and well-planned surprises, in causing considerable damage to the Russian forces, and had captured rich booty in arms and ammunition. It is true these results did not hinder the persistent advances of the enemy. From the north, from the river Kuban, they were continually strengthening their power, and tightening their hold on the mountaineers. Usban-ok and his followers were ordered thither. But he longed to visit his Juneh once more, and, with all the members of his tribe, solemnly keep the great feast of the Tha-Nan.

V.

The Sacrificial Feast.

The day of the feast arrived. Usban-ok went with nearly all the people of his Juneh over the nearest mountain range to old Marjom's Juneh, where all the members of the Juneh-is, that is, 'a hundred farmsteads,' had assembled together. A broad meadow, shut in by dark oak trees which had withstood the storms of a hundred years, was the place where the sacrifice was to be offered. Under the shade of a gigantic tree, in front of a large, ancient, roughly-carved cross, was erected, without cement, an altar of red stone.

When the young Pole arrived on the spot, he found the meadow filled with a dense multitude of men, women and children. And he had some trouble to find a place from whence he could witness the sacrifice without, however, taking any part in it. Around the altar, he saw four young bulls, eight sheep, and as many he-goats standing securely fastened by the horns. The stone-

table of the altar was covered with dishes containing bread, wheat and maize-cakes, honey and butter, milk and *schwett.* *Schwett* is a drink made from millet and honey. It has a most disagreeable taste, and is very intoxicating. Old Marjom approached the altar clad in white, woolen festal-garments. He was a fine, well-built old man with a long silver-beard. He uncovered his head. A profound silence reigned in the circle of the men and amongst the groups of women, so that one could hear the crackling of the fir branches in the 30 fires arranged in a semi-circle which burnt round the altar.

The old man, his eyes fixed on the cross, the rich graces of which however he did not understand, began to recite in a loud voice a prayer which the crowd half-muttering, half-singing repeated. Perecinski could only understand the words: "Glorious God (Tha dake)! Great God (Tha schuha)! We poor sinners pray to thee (Tamitschki)! Jesus, Son of God (Jesha, tha-ok)! Mary, Mother of God (Mar athanan)! God! God! (Tha, Tha!)". The Pole did not hear any other prayer. Filled with compassion, he prayed that the most merciful God and the ever-

blessed Virgin would enlighten these poor blind people, and lead them to His grace and truth.

The prayers which lasted about a quarter of an hour formed the introduction to the sacrifice. Then the old man covered his head with the fur cap of the Abkasians, and all the men followed his example. Two boys stood by him, one at each side. The one on his right held three knives of different sizes on a round wooden plate; the one on his left held three wooden bowls placed one in the other. Perecinski recognized in the boy who handed the knives to the old man, his young friend Marjub. A doubt arose in his mind, as to whether he would not have done better, had he explained to the boy that he ought not to take part in the superstitious ceremony. But he thought again: "I could not have instructed Marjub in so short a time, and so it was better for me to tell him to do what he looks upon as well-pleasing to God."

The old priest now took the largest of the three knives which Marjub held to him, and made a sign to Usban-ok, as the chief of the most important Juneh, to come forward,

and re-handed the knife to him. Usban-ok took it and passed it on to the chief next in rank to himself. The knife of sacrifice was quickly passed from hand to hand through the whole assembly till it got back to the priest again.

Young Malek was one of the last in the ranks of the men. When he took hold of the knife he called out to the Pole to come and touch the implement of sacrifice as well as the others. "It will bring you a blessing and good luck," said he. Perecinski would not and durst not do that; because taking hold of the sacrificial knife meant participating in the sacrifice, for it was to show that the priest offered the sacrifice in the name of all those who touched the knife. He declined therefore. But his doing so enraged the young Abkasian: "Dog of a Christian," he cried, "what! you will not hold any sacrificial intercourse with us? Up to the present I have looked upon you as my friend, and I thought we should fight shoulder to shoulder against our common enemy in the next engagement. But he who refuses to join with me in prayer, can never be my brother-in-arms.—"

The Pole persisted in his refusal and would not touch the knife, that he might not render himself guilty of taking part in a heathen sacrifice. In vain Malek reiterated his reproach, his eyes flashing with indignation the while. "If you do not offer sacrifice with us," said he, "I shall look upon you as a traitor, and will bid my father treat you as a slave in future."

"Even if you were to threaten me with death, I would not take any part in your sacrifice," replied the Pole firmly.

The interruption which this short conversation had occasioned, drew the attention of the whole assembly upon the two young men. "What is the matter, Malek?" cried Usban-ok, "Pass the knife on!"

"The Christian from our Juneh will not touch it," answered the youth. A storm of indignation broke out amongst the Abkasians, and loud cries were heard demanding that the knife should be thrust through the heart of the Christian.

Marjom commanded silence: "What! will you interrupt the sacrifice with savage cries?" said he. "I fear the great God will not look upon it with pleasure. And you,

Malek, why do you invite a Christian to take part in our sacrifice? Let not such a one, on any account, touch the sacred knife, or the sacrifice will not be clean in the sight of the great Tha-Nan. Bind the man fast to the great oak tree there, that he may not disturb us again. When the sacrifice is ended we will consider what shall be done with him."

The order was instantly obeyed. Perecinski was seized and bound with cords to the trunk of the tree. The sacrifice then continued. When the knife came round to the priest again, he made a sign for the first sacrificial bull to be brought to him. Six strong fellows threw the animal on the ground before the altar and held it fast, whilst the old priest repeating: "Tha, Tha-Jesha, Tha-Nan," cut its throat, and filled one of the wooden bowls with its blood.

The three other bulls were slaughtered in the same manner. And when the blood had ceased to flow, the carcasses were dragged to the fire and cut up for the feast. Then all the people repeated and sang the above quoted formula of prayer, whilst the priest raised the blood-stained knife to the cross.

The second knife went round. The sheep were slaughtered. Another wooden bowl was filled with blood, and the victims were drawn to the caldrons and cut up. This knife also was held up towards the cross, whilst prayers were said. Lastly, the third knife was passed from hand to hand. And when the he-goats had been slaughtered with similar rites, the three wooden bowls were placed on the right side of the altar, and every one pressed forward to steep a cloth, or dip a finger in the blood to which the Abkasians ascribe a superstitious virtue. The men sprinkled their weapons with the blood, thinking thus to consecrate them, and to make them deadly against the enemy.

The second part of the feast began. Whilst the young people were busy attending to the fire and the caldrons, preparing the festal banquet, the newly-married couples drew near, in regular order, to old Marjom to lay their petitions before him. The priest listened to them, and taking off his fur headgear, put it under his arm and carried their petitions before the cross, breathing low-whispered prayers as he did so. The great Tha and his mother were besieged

with requests for health and happiness; for blessings on hearth and home; for victory and booty, and for vengeance on the Russians. When all the petitions had been presented, that portion of the sacrificial feast followed, which kept closest to the old Christian traditions. The old man went up to the altar again; took a large, flat cake in his hands, and turning towards the assembly, said solemnly:

"The bread which you brought to be offered to the great Tha, has lain on this dish, and is made holy; eat of this bread, and it will bring you prosperity." He then broke the cake into small pieces, and distributed them amongst the married people. Then he took a wooden vessel filled with *schwett*, and let the people drink out of it in turns.

Perecinski, who had watched the whole proceeding from his tree, was vividly reminded of the Last Supper. He felt deeply grieved that this most holy mystery of Divine love should, through the ignorance of these poor people, be degraded to a meaningless and superstitious ceremony.

Loud cries of joy however soon awoke him out of his reverie. The festal banquet

had begun. The families were seated in groups under the trees; the elderly people were served first by the boys and girls who handed round the flesh of the victims cooked in millet seed. The drink of the multitude was the intoxicating *schwett*, handed round in great jugs. In the meantime the long summer day had declined; the shadows were lengthening over the meadows, and the twilight was seen creeping over the valleys. But the feast was not nearly over. Louder and wilder became the shouts, and more hoarse the singing of the drunken Abkasians. The *schwett* was beginning to take effect.

Perecinski observed the men, with inflamed features and bloodshot eyes, dancing round the blazing fires and brandishing their flashing scimitars. He was terrified at the sight. Of what were not these half-savage men capable in a state of intoxication? One group in particular appeared already to be plotting the murder of the Christian, who had caused a disturbance at the time of the sacrifice. They pointed towards him with their fingers and swords, and, as far as he could understand their words, at the distance

and amid the shouting, several were actually clamoring for his blood in atonement for the interruption of their sacrifice. He believed his last hour had come, and prepared himself to die. He made an act of sorrow and contrition from the bottom of his heart, and besought God to accept his blood in lieu of the sacrament of penance. Then he remembered his poor old mother, far away in her little cabin by the Vistula, anxiously awaiting his return, or, perhaps, even then praying to the Blessed Virgin for him at Ezenstochan; and he implored the Mother of mercy to help him in his dire necessity, and lead him safely home.

As he prayed thus in his agony, suddenly a thought came to his mind: "Promise the Blessed Virgin that you will, with God's grace, lead the two children, who are pining here in heathenism, and yet, in their way so devoutly honor her, to the knowledge of the truth." It came to his mind, like an inspiration from above, and he vowed, if it were in his power, to instruct the children in the faith, and prepare them for holy Baptism.

Meanwhile the Abkasians around the fires

appeared to occupy themselves more and more about the fate of the Pole; and more and more general became the cry: "Death to the Christian!" Usban-ok and Marjom, the old priest, it is true, pleaded for the stranger, though not very zealously; but the fury of the drunken horde knew no bounds. Brak-ok, Usban-ok's son-in-law, who had drunk a great deal of the intoxicating *schwett*, was particularly urgent in his demand for the blood of the stranger, his eyes flashing with hatred all the time. Perecinski closed his eyes so as to pray more calmly, for he expected every moment that the madmen would fall upon him and cut him to pieces.

Suddenly he heard the voice of Mara close beside him. "Stranger," whispered the little girl, "the men are going to kill you, flee!"

"How can I, little Mara? "I am bound fast to the tree."

"Oh, I have a knife, and the great Tha-Nan will help me to cut through the thick cord. There — There! Slip behind the tree, and creep softly along under the shadow to the rocks by the stream. My

brother Marjub is waiting for you there, and he will help you. He told me what I was to do, so as to lead the men astray. Quick, why do you linger?"

"Good little Mara, the Blessed Virgin grant that I may one day reward your own and your brother's love!"

"This very night she comes down from Heaven to bless all good people. I think she will bless you too, although you would not touch the knife to-day. But make haste and flee!"

VI.

A Conversation in the Ruins of Drandi.

On the south-western slope of the Caucasus many ancient churches of the Abkasians are still standing. They date from the days when the small tract of land between sea and mountain was still Christian. When later on the Turks took possession of the land, the Abkasians withdrew to their impenetrable ravines and to the upper valleys of the Caucasus, where they indeed maintained their independence, but sank back again little by little into that heathenism of which we have been speaking. Of the venerable sanctuaries on the sea shore, some had been converted into Turkish mosques, and later on, into Russian churches, others had fallen into ruins and the old crumbling walls were overgrown with vegetation. By far the most beautiful and most important of these ruins is that of the church of Drandi, which, judging from its architecture, appears

to date from the time of the Crusades. A few huts are standing against the old walls, by whose high-towering gables they are more threatened than protected.

In one of the huts dwelt a certain Hadschi Keranduk, a crafty, treacherous fellow, who, at one time in the pay of the Russians, at another acting as a spy to the Turks, was capable of any villany, if it brought him any gain. He had once sent the head of a Polish officer, who wanted to join the Abkasians as a volunteer, to the Russian commander, and received 400 roubles in return for it. Soon after the sacrificial feast, which turned out so disastrously for Perecinski, Hadschi Keranduk was sitting one afternoon by his garden fence smoking his pipe, when an Abkasian came up, and, leaning on the fence, spoke thus to the notorious rascal:

"Good afternoon, brother Hadschi Keranduk."

"Is that you, Brak-ok? said the man suddenly starting from his reverie. "How is your father-in-law, Usban-ok, and the rest of the brave fellows at your Juneh? Do you want any powder and shot? or have you made peace with the Russians before

they come and burn your houses over your heads?"

"Usban-ok took more powder and shot from the Russians in the Kasbec pass than you have in your vaults under the old church. He did not send me here for that, but to enquire whether the troops are coming which the Turks promised to send?"

"They will come, Brak-ok, together with a division of Poles to whom the Sultan has lent some cannon."

"Poles! —they say, you sold some Poles' heads to the Russians lately. I very nearly brought one here with me."

"Do they really say that?" said Hadschi, distorting his features by a hideous grin. "But you appear to have some other little business in your mind. Come over to the old ruin with me. We shall be able to speak there without fear of interruption."

The old man got up and walked before the Abkasian, through grass and brushwood, to a lonely spot in the ruins. He sat down under the shadow of the crumbling wall, and signaled to Brak-ok to sit down likewise.

"What's this about Poles' heads?" said the old man softly. "Speak without fear."

Brak-ok related the events of the last feast, and the wonderful escape of the young Pole by the intervention of Tha-Nan.

"You see, Hadschi," said he, in conclusion, "I was standing so, in front of the stranger who was fast bound to a tree; and I swung my scimitar, so, — and when its blade nearly touched the Pole's neck — Puff, he was gone!"

"What? the scimitar?"

"No, the Pole!"

"What! disappeared before your very eyes!" said the old man laughing.

"He vanished in the air, as true, as I, Brak-ok, am Usban-ok's son-in-law."

"And did the Tha-Nan do that for a man who would not even touch the knife of sacrifice in her honor?"

"Who else could have done it?" asked the Abkasian. Old Hadschi thoughtfully puffed the smoke out of his pipe and said:

"You could not have fastened him tightly to the tree."

"I tell you he was bound so fast that the strength of a bullock could not have broken the bonds. I fastened the cord and knotted it round the tree myself."

"But you must have been drinking a great deal of *schwett* before he disappeared from your sight."

"That's true, but even the *schwett* which we had drunk could not have loosened the knots which I tied."

"Well, I would rather Tha-Nan should have dragged him away over the tops of the trees, as old Marjom affirms, than that you should have cut him in pieces with your scimitar. I think she will not have carried him far off. But, I say, Brak-ok, has the Pole any particular friend in your Juneh?"

"Not that I know of. Malek liked him very well at first, but at the feast he turned against him because he would not join in the sacrifice. There are the two children, it is true — Marjub and Mara — whom he was always with in the Juneh; and they were also at the feast.—"

"That's enough," said old Hadschi, stroking his grey bristly beard. "Now, brave Brak-ok, keep a sharp eye on the two children; you will soon find out where Tha-Nan has carried the Pole to."

"What does it matter to me?" answered Brak-ok. "That night I would have cut

him to pieces, for the *schwett* always makes me quarrelsome; but now I shall let him alone. Did'nt he come over to us, to fight with us against the Russians?"

"You may cut him to pieces or not, as you like," said Hadschi raising his eyebrows. "But, if you *should* kill him, don't forget to bring me his head; I will give you a hundred silver roubles down for it."

"A hundred roubles!" exclaimed the Abkasian, opening his eyes very wide. "Then it is quite true what people are saying that you sell the heads of Polish deserters to the commander of the nearest Russian outpost?"

"One must try to get some of the Russian money," said Hadschi laughing. "Are they not our enemies? And is not a sackful of roubles, with which arms and powder can be bought, worth more than a dead man's head, which is of no use at all?"

"A hundred roubles!" repeated Brak-ok. "But it is against the rights of hospitality. My father-in-law, Usban-ok, would never do it."

"Is the Pole still in your Juneh? No, he is not. He left it, and so has renounced all

claim to hospitality. Besides you need not tell your father-in-law anything about it. It is enough for him to know that the Tha-Nan has carried off the Pole. Then if you should perchance slay him, no one will care, or enquire anything about him. I don't say 'do it'! I only say: 'If you do it,'—don't forget to bring me the head, and you shall get the hundred roubles."

"It is a good sum, as true as I am an honest Abkasian! And he really deserves to die for refusing to touch the knife of sacrifice. Don't you think so, Hadschi?"

"At all events you thought so when you had drunk the holy *schwett.*"

"*We* did; but old Marjom judged otherwise. And now that I am sober, I must say the Pole never did me any harm. But the hundred roubles!—"

"Drink *schwett!* when you've got *schwett* in your head again, you'll think the same as before. But at any rate, remember; if *you* don't earn the hundred roubles, somebody else will!"

"Stop, brother! if it must be, and you will have his head in any case—then I don't see why another should get the money in-

stead of me. So it's a bargain between us, old Hadschi Keranduk. But, I say, brother, could'nt you give me half down now as a sort of security?"

"Not a penny before I see the head!"

"You think I should pocket the money and not bring the head? But if you won't trust me, why should I trust you? Mark well, Hadschi Keranduk, if you keep so much as *one* of the hundred roubles, my sword shall split your skull. Do you understand me?"

"My faith! you are a hot-headed, dangerous fellow, brave Brak-ok!" said the old traitor with a forced smile. "In a bargain like ours, mutual interest must create confidence. As far as regards the landing of Turkish re-inforcements, you can inform Usban-ok that Sefer-Pasha, who is in the neighborhood, is daily expecting them. I will send my boy to the Juneh, when it is time to march on the Kuban; for the attack from both sides must be simultaneous if it is to succeed at all. Only, don't forget to come for the hundred roubles first. And now, farewell, brave and prudent Brak-ok! Don't forget to keep an eye on the children;

they will lead you on the right track before the sun has sunk three times into the sea."

The two men, after bargaining about the life of Perecinski, rose up and separated. Brak-ok went towards the mountain. Old Hadschi looked sullenly after him. "He will bring me the head," said he. "And I will take care he does not split mine." Thereupon he put his hand to his head involuntarily and muttered: "These rough fellows from the mountains! One must be on one's guard against them!"

VII.

The First Instruction.

To return to our young friend Perecinski, we will go back in our story to the morning which followed the eventful feast.

The young Pole, and his little rescuer Marjub, were in a hut about a mile and a half from Usban-ok's Juneh. The place served as a shelter for the goatherds; but it was empty now, and Marjub had brought the fugitive by the light of the moon, along by the stream, to this place of refuge.

It was near daybreak when they reached the hiding-place. "You can hide yourself here," said the boy. "There is a cavern in the rock which can be reached from the back of the hut. My brother will not find you here, nor the other men who want to sacrifice you to the Tha-Nan. Mara and I will bring you some bread and cheese and eggs, until the war is over, and you are free to go back to your home, and to your mother whom you told us about a little while ago."

"Dear Marjub," said the Pole, "you and your little sister have saved my life. With God's grace I will in return, help you to obtain a better life. Leave me now, and hasten back to your Juneh that your father may not miss you."

"He won't miss me," said Marjub. "The day after the feast of sacrifice, all grown-up Abkasians, from the quantity of holy *schwett* which they drink, are heavy-headed and sleep in their huts. I shall stop with you till Mara comes and brings us news, whether they have determined to pursue and search for you. Go into the cave now, and lie down to rest."

Perecinski followed Marjub's instructions. He felt his way cautiously into the cavern, and found a bed of dried ferns. No sooner had he stretched himself upon the ground, after a short prayer, than, in consequence of his great fatigue, and of the excitement he had undergone, he fell into a deep sleep.

Marjub also lay down; but sleep did not come to him so quickly, for he was pondering over that better life which the Pole had promised to him and Mara. "Will he make me a prince and give me beautiful weapons,

such as the prince had who came to our Juneh in the spring? And will he give Mara golden ornaments, such as the king's daughters wore whom old Nana told us about?" Thus thinking he fell asleep, and there mingled with his dreams these pictures of the better life.

It appeared to him as though he were sitting on a richly-caparisoned steed, and the sun shone on the precious stones which ornamented the golden handle of his sword. "Look," said he to Mara, who, dressed in costly silken garments, sat by him on a white palfry, "look at these glorious weapons which the Pole has given me!" And Mara answered: "The golden circlet which fastens my veil is still more beautiful." Then the dream changed, and it seemed to him they were being pursued by enemies, and they rode faster and faster so as to outstrip their followers. But although they urged on their horses to the utmost, they seemed not to move from the spot; and soon they heard the horses' hoofs behind them, and felt the hot breath of the animals on their necks. Marjub drew the beautiful sword and looked round, but benumbed with horror, his arm

fell to his side. It was his brother-in-law Brak-ok, who stole his beautiful weapon from him with the words: "You shall not have any better life than our father and we.—"

Then Marjub awoke with a scream. It was late in the afternoon. Mara was standing before him, and said: "What dreadful dreams you have had! I should soon have aroused you from sleep, for you were groaning terribly."

"Is that you, Mara?" asked the boy, as yet only half-awake. "Ah, they have taken all those beautiful things away from us, from me—the beautiful sword with the golden handle and the glittering jewels, and from you, that lovely coronet!" Then he told his sister his dream, and what the Pole had said about a better life. The children's voices awoke the sleeper in the cave, and he soon came out to them. They sat down together in front of the hut, under the shade of an old fir tree, which with its dark branches reaching almost to the ground quite covered the miserable little thatched roof. Before them the mountain stream rushed over boulders overgrown with moss,

and on the opposite bank, and behind the hut, rose up perpendicularly the grey rocks, dotted here and there with traces of the scantiest vegetation. The sun had already sunk over the little valley, and its red rays now slightly tinged the upper seam of the rocky wall opposite and the fir trees which grew upon it.

The Pole thought he had never in his life seen such an awfully desolate spot; but the children who were used to this mountainous scenery felt quite at home in the ravine.

"You are safe here," said Marjub, who had observed the impression which the gloomy surroundings had made on the stranger. "No Abkasians will look for you here. And now, Mara, tell us what went on at the end of the feast yesterday, and what they are doing in the Juneh to-day."

"The great Tha-Nan visibly protected you, stranger" said the little girl; "for scarcely had I cut through the cords and let you escape into the bushes, when the men rushed up with drawn swords to kill you. They would most certainly have cut you to pieces, if you had been still fastened to the tree. I had barely time to hide

myself and the cord behind the trees. When they reached the spot and did not find you, they broke out into loud yells: 'Where is he gone?' they cried. 'Just now he was standing here firmly bound, and now both he and the ropes are gone!—' 'He must have melted away in the air!—I saw him a moment ago with my own eyes!' said one. And they gazed at each other in amazement. 'This has not happened by fair means!' cried old Murkos; 'the devil has carried him off.—' 'Or perhaps the great Tha-Nan has snatched him out of our hands!' said Marjom, who offered up the sacrifice.—And I think he spoke the truth, and that the Mother of God did save your life by our hands. It was because you told us such beautiful things about her a little while ago that Marjub and I thought of the plan to set you free.''

Mara related how after Marjom's words, no one thought of pursuing the fugitive, and she then produced a basket from which she took a bowl of thick millet porridge—which is called *Schwa-Pasta* by the Abkasians, and forms their ordinary food—and placed it before the Pole, with cheese and

bread-cakes in addition. Then she filled a shell with water from the brook and said: "Now eat and drink. I asked Nana to give me this food for a poor man — so don't think I stole it or told a story about it. Whilst you are eating you can tell us about that better life which you spoke of to Marjub."

"Thank you, good Mara, and you also, dear Marjub, for saving my life yesterday and for bringing me food to-day. You are my ravens now, like those who carried bread to Elias; or rather, you are like the good angel who fed Daniel in the lion's den. Do you know those stories?" The children had never heard about them. So he told them about the prophet Elias, and about Habakuk whom the angel carried by his hair to Babylon. "O how that must have hurt him," said Mara, putting her hand to her head, "I would sooner go over to the Juneh on foot." Marjub laughed and said the angel had delicate fingers, and did not tear the hair out like old Nana when she was angry.

The Pole said a little prayer, and then sat down to eat. He wanted to give the children

their share also. Marjub took his; but Mara was not to be persuaded; for, amongst the Abkasians custom forbids women and girls to eat in the presence of men. When they had partaken of their refreshment, Perecinski began his instruction on the better life. He told the children how God created men and made them his children; and how they were permitted to live in a beautiful garden with Him as long as they were good. And the garden was full of lovely flowers and fruits, which were very sweet and delicious to the taste. And all the animals in the beautiful garden were tame, and obeyed men at a word or a sign. The young hares came and played with them; the timid deer did not run away, even the savage bear and the ferocious wolf did not hurt them. And the birds of the air rested on their hands and sang them lovely songs. And there were never any wars, nor even any quarrels amongst men, so long as they remained children of God, but pure love reigned everywhere. The most beautiful of all, however, was that God Himself dwelt with them like a good father with his children, and talked with

them full of goodness and fatherly kindness. Death had no power over men, so that they could go to God in Heaven without dying. Must not that have been a beautiful life, a better life than we have now?

"O how happy men were then!" said Mara. "But you are only telling us a fairy tale like old Nana does when she talks to us about the pigmies who live in the middle of the mountains in golden chambers!"

"It is no fairy tale, but the very truth. That, and even much more happiness which I could tell you of, they enjoyed as long as they remained in innocence."

"Why did they not always remain children of God?" asked Marjub.

"Because they became wicked and disobedient to God, their Father, Who hates sin. He expelled them from this beautiful garden, and gave them up to misery and death."

"And you say you can give us this glorious life in God's beautiful home again? If you possess this life and can go into the lovely garden, why do you stay here? Why don't you make haste and go there and take us with you?" inquired Marjub.

"I hope I shall have this life; for I hope I am a child of God. Every child of God has the key to the eternal Paradise of his Father who is in Heaven. Yet I dare not go before He sends a messenger to call me. Then if I have not lost the key, I shall be allowed to enter into the garden of eternal pleasure."

"Show us the key," said Mara.

"The key rests in my heart. I can only make use of it when I die."

"Can you give us keys like to it?" asked Marjub.

"Yes, for I can make you also children of God."

"O make us children of God!" pleaded both Marjub and Mara. "We are already children of the Blessed Mother of God."

"That is the best way of becoming children of God. But I must teach you a great deal more before I can make you children of God. For to-day, it is high time you went back to the Juneh. But come again to-morrow if you can, and I will, by God's grace, in return for my temporal life which you saved, obtain for you eternal life in God's beautiful garden. Pray meanwhile

to the Mother of God, and place yourselves under her protection. See, the last rays of the sun are gilding the tops of the pines above the precipice."

VIII.

The Old Man on the Elbruz.

Brak-ok was back again at the Juneh. He was sitting on the evening of his return with a group of other men before the door of the great house, which his father-in-law, Usban-ok, as head of the homestead, occupied. It was not like a palace, you must understand. It was a simple, wooden house divided into rooms by rough beams and planks. But it looked beautiful in the eyes of the poor inhabitants of the Caucasus. The rest of the people belonging to the Juneh lived in miserable cabins, the walls of which were made of wattle-work besmeared with clay. Brak-ok was telling them about his expedition. Naturally, enough, he did not say one word about the crime which he and old Hadschi had planned. But he talked about Sefer-Pasha and the Turkish soldiers; and how every day fresh ships were expected from Constantinople bringing with them a regiment of Poles

well-armed to help the Abkasians against the Russians.

Then there arose dissension among his hearers. Old Murkos was not willing to trust the Poles. He had heard that their language was almost the same as that of the Russians; and who could guarantee that they would not simply be playing the traitor? Very likely they were only coming to explore the secret paths and mountain passes so as to betray them to the enemy.

Usban-ok denied this. "The Poles have been robbed of their country and their freedom by the Russians, and therefore they make common cause with all who oppose the Russians. I am not afraid of the Poles; but I very much fear the Turks. If they help us to drive the Russians from our mountains, they only do it that they themselves may rule over us. But we will be free, not fettered like the old man on the Elbruz!"

"The old man on the Elbruz!" cried Malek. "Tell us about him, Marjom."

The old priest, whom we became acquainted with at the feast of the Tha-Nan, had ridden over to Usban-ok's Juneh to

hear what news Brak-ok had brought from the coast. He stroked his white beard and began to narrate the old legend which reached the Caucasus more than two thousand years ago — perhaps, through some banished Greeks or Romans. It may even be of still greater age — a tradition from Asia, which, under the form of the Greek Prometheus, describes the rebellion and punishment of Lucifer.

"Do you see the peak of Elbruz shining yonder over the dark pine wood? It is nothing but the snow and ice that never melt. Up there on the highest point, where the wind raves and rages from noon to midnight, from morn to eventide, there is an immense, flat table-rock. On it sits a very old man. Snow-white hair falls from his head; his silver beard reaches down to his feet, and his whole body is covered with white hair, like the snowy fox in winter. The nails of his hands and feet are long and formed like the claws of the eagle. His eyes are blood-red and shine like coals of fire. When we see the mountain lighted up long after the sun has sunk into the sea, it is the shining of his

eyes. He wears heavy chains round his neck and loins, and on his hands and feet, which are firmly fastened to the rock. Very often on quiet nights their rattling, together with his dismal groans, are heard from the mountain, and it always betokens great misfortune for our country. When the brave Sheik Shamyl was vanquished and taken prisoner by the Russians, I heard the old man of Elbruz for three nights screaming aloud and moaning with pain.

For thousands of years the old man has been sitting up there fast-chained. He was formerly a servant and friend of the great Tha (God) who on account of his great intellect honored him so highly that he conversed intimately with him. But wicked thoughts came into his head. He wanted to be as powerful, if not even more powerful, than the great Tha himself. And as he knew a great many of his secrets, and thought he knew all, he revolted against him, and wanted to thrust Tha from his throne. The madman! who can compare with Tha? The foolhardy creature was bound and fettered on the top of Elbruz. 'Is your throne high enough here?' said the great

Tha to him. Only a very few people have seen the old man of Elbruz; for the way to him is very difficult and full of danger. But I know three old men who have seen him. They live far away from here in the eastern mountains, and they dare not for their lives tell all that they saw and heard. Nobody ever dares to go a second time to him. My father, who tried to go, in order to get counsel about the war with the Russians, paid for his temerity with his life."

Thus spoke old Marjom. The men were silent and looked up at the snow-capped mountain and shuddered at the thought of the torments which the foolhardy rebel against the great Tha was suffering up there in snow and ice and everlasting chains. Marjub and Mara had cowered behind the door and listened attentively during the narration. The little sister whispered: "Marjub, I think the wicked man with the great bird's claws must be the devil whom the good Pole told us of yesterday."

Brak-ok was sitting near and, softly as these words were whispered, he understood by them that the Pole had been speaking to the children yesterday. His eyes glittered

ominously and he muttered to himself: "Hadschi, you were right! The children know where the Tha-Nan carried the stranger to."

He pressed his ear against the crack of the door, in order to learn yet more from the children's conversation, and he heard Marjub reprove his sister for mentioning the Pole. "How easily one of the men might have heard you," said he, "and then perhaps it might have cost him his life, and who would then give us the better life which the old man of the Elbruz had also before he became wicked? But girls are always imprudent and never can keep a secret."

Brak-ok had heard enough. He determined to watch the children closely, and even to use force, if cunning and pretended kindness did not enable him to discover their secret. Just then his attention was diverted. Usban-ok had asked whether it would not be advisable to send a man up the Elbruz to learn the opinion of the mountain spirit about the war. Old Marjom declared himself ready to undertake the task of discovering the will of the great Tha on that subject.

A leathern sack was fetched from the chief Juneh, containing the bones and joints of one of the sheep which were slaughtered at the last sacrifice. Marjom, who carried on at the same the profitable trade of a soothsayer, got ready to perform his office with the usual juggling tricks. He described a circle, in the middle of which—murmuring secret words—he placed the skull of a goat. Then he strode three times round the circle with the leathern sack, swinging it to and fro and muttering strange, unintelligible jargon, whilst all the assembly with gloomy awe, silently watched his movements. Suddenly he stopped and quickly emptied the contents of the sack on the ground over the goat-skull, crying out loudly: "Tha! Tha-Nan! Jesha-Tha-ok!" From all lips arose the cry: "Tha permits it!" The skull of a sheep was left hanging between the horns of the goat's skull.

"Yes, the great Tha permits it," said Marjom, "and he wishes that a robust young man from this Juneh should risk the journey quite alone. Just see how the smooth frontal bone of the goat's skull stands erect!"

A fresh cry of astonishment arose amongst

the superstitious audience "Who is it to be?" asked Usban-ok. "Not my son Malek?"

"The young men of the Juneh must cast lots," answered the soothsayer. Bring a bag with colored beans, and let all stand in a row and, blindfolded, draw out one. He who draws the lightest colored, is the one whom the old man of the Elbruz is calling!"

"So be it," said all present. Usban-ok gathered the young men of his Juneh together, and Marjom blindfolded them. Then they put their hands into the bag, one after the other, and drew forth a bean. Those who dipped into the bag first drew forth dark beans, blue-black, and dark-brown. Malek drew a light yellow one, and his father's countenance fell at the sight of it; for there was only one more young man left, and if he also drew a dark one, then his son would be obliged to undertake the perilous expedition from which scarcely any one returned alive. In great suspense every one looked at the last who put his hand into the bag. It was Brak-ok. He lowered his hand slowly amongst the beans and tremblingly drew forth one. He held it still hidden in his hand till the

bandage was removed from his eyes. Then he relaxed his fingers — and lo! — a snow-white bean was shining in his hand! With a curse he threw it from him, as if it were a burning coal. But it was too late; the bystanders had seen it, and all cried out: "The old man of the Elbruz is calling the brave Brak-ok!"

Usban-ok was very pleased at the decision. He therefore invited all present to a great feast to be given the next evening to commemorate Brak-ok's departure. At this feast, according to the custom of the Abkasians, a little table was placed before each man, and was changed with every dish. Every Abkasian dainty was served up: Turkey in red pepper sauce; meat and cheese dumplings; finely minced mutton in pepper sauce; cheese sandwiches steeped in butter, and millet porridge with sour milk. In addition, *schwett* flowed in streams and all the men did honor to it. Brak-ok alone was like one sentenced to death seated at his last meal.

But suddenly a thought came into his mind and his countenance brightened up. "Fool!" said he. "Who can force me to go

up the Elbruz? I will pretend to go; and I will make use of my absence from the Juneh to finish my business with Hadschi, and get the hundred silver roubles. — That it should just fall to *my* lot! Well, I can throw dust in the eyes of Usban-ok and Marjom who are so delighted to send me off to the Elbruz!"

IX.

Various Plans.

The morning after the parting feast, the sun was already above the shining summit of Elbruz when Brak-ok, equipped for the journey, left his father-in-law's house to begin the dangerous ascent of the ice-clad mountain. At all events his friends believed so. Usban-ok and the rest of the men of the Juneh shook hands with the traveller, and wished him a safe journey. The women and children also wished him good-bye.

"Where are Marjub and Mara?" said he.

"Yes, where are the two children? I have seen them very seldom in the Juneh of late," said Usban-ok.

"They are rambling about the hills," answered old Nana. "They got me to give them some bread and meat to-day, and ran off quite early."

"They must not go rambling about the hills, wasting their time any more," said Usban-ok. "It is high time you put Mara to

the loom and taught her to weave beautiful textures such as her mother used to make. As for Marjub, I will myself get him some work to do."

Brak-ok went out of the Juneh. The men accompanied him as far as the skirt of the wood and then came back, well-pleased that the lot of ascending the Elbruz had not fallen upon them. Brak-ok went bravely on his way, but when the next chain of hills hid him from the sight of his companions, he sat down under a fir-tree and laughed scornfully to himself. "You fools!" said he. "Do you think I shall break my neck up in the glaciers of the Elbruz? I must look out for a place to hide in for a few days, that I may watch the Juneh, and more especially the two children; and I shall be very much surprised if I don't have the hundred roubles in my purse within a very short time!"

Whilst Brak-ok, after a rest, was climbing to the top of a neighboring rock where he, himself concealed by shrubs, could overlook the valley of the Juneh and the roads which led to it, Mara and Marjub were with the Pole in the goatherd's hut. Perecinski had

made good use of the two weeks which had elapsed since the sacrifice and his first instruction to the children about the better life and the children of God. They knew now that there is only one God in three Persons; that the great Tha-Nan was not a goddess, but a creature of God, the purest and holiest Virgin, who had been chosen to be the Mother of God; that of her was born the Son of God, who lay as a little weak infant in the crib in the stable at Bethlehem; that Jesus Christ died on the Cross for us and redeemed us from all our sins by His Precious Blood.

Mara shed tears when the Pole told them about the great and painful death-agony and the tender love of the Savior. Marjub felt very angry with the Jews who so cruelly tormented and derided Him. But Perecinski informed the boy that the Savior bore all His sufferings willingly for our sins, and that therefore we were really the cause of the pain and the shame which He endured.

Then Marjub opened his eyes wide and said: "When I was proud, and disobedient, and idle; and when I was angry and vin-

dictive — did my wickedness wound and grieve the dear Savior?"

"Yes, Marjub, He knew all that on the Cross; for He is the true and all-knowing God. And it grieved Him that Mara and Marjub, and I, were sinful; and He took the sin upon Himself and suffered for it."

"I will never commit sin any more then!" said Marjub.

"Nor I either!" protested Mara.

"That is a good resolution," said Perecinski,"presuming it is humble; that is, that you do not trust in your own strength, but in the grace of Jesus Christ. You must therefore pray to God every day and implore the Blessed Virgin to unite her prayers with yours."

"We will," said Mara. "Marjub and I have always raised up our hands in prayer to the Blessed Mother of God every day, even when we did not know her, as you have now taught us to know her. But tell us how we can become children of God, and cleanse our hearts from sin."

"What do you do, Mara, when your frock is soiled?" asked Perecinski.

"Oh, I wash it — but I can't wash my heart."

"We can also wash our hearts and souls. The divine Redeemer instituted a bath for our souls in which they are cleansed from all stain of sin, and we become again the children of God."

"Show us that bath! Wash us in that bath?" cried the children. "But perhaps it is a long, long way off from our mountains," said Marjub sorrowfully.

"No, here in this brook I can wash every stain from your souls. You believe in Jesus Christ. If I pour some of this water on your heads and say at the same time the words: 'I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,' the water possesses the mysterious power of the blood of Jesus Christ, cleanses your soul from every sin, and imparts to you the supernatural life of children of God."

The Pole thereupon related the history of the institution of holy Baptism and explained its effects more fully to the attentively listening children. At length Marjub said: "If it is so easy to make us children of God, why do you wait any longer? See,

here is the mountain stream. Quick! baptize Mara and me!"

Perecinski smiled and said: "Well, children, I have been pondering over it in my heart for some time past, and it is my one and only desire to make you children of God. But could you, in these mountains, fulfil the duties which holy Baptism would impose on you? You must renounce Satan and all his works. And here you will be compelled to take part in the superstitious sacrifices, although they are an abomination in the sight of God. Then again, they would not let you go with them to fight against the enemy, Marjub, which you long so much to do, unless you first offered up sacrifice with the other men, and hung all sorts of superstitious amulets round your neck. And your father would oblige you to take vengeance on your enemy, although the Lord commands us: 'Love your enemies.' I dare not baptize you here and run the risk of your afterwards denying the faith."

Tears came into the children's eyes as he spoke these words. "So you will not make us children of God?" murmured Marjub.

But Mara interposed: "You told us a little while ago about Abraham, who was called by God out of his home to a far-off land. Perhaps God will call Marjub and me to a foreign land. Would you be able to baptize us if we went away with you into the far-off land where your mother lives?"

Perecinski's heart beat wildly for joy at the words of the little maiden. "Mara," said he, "Your guardian angel, guided by the Blessed Virgin, suggested that to you. 'He who loves father or mother, more than me, is not worthy of me,' said Jesus Christ. 'But he who for my sake leaves father or mother, or brother or sister, or house or home, the same shall obtain eternal life.' Yes, Mara, on the day when you are ready to flee with me, I will baptize you and make you children of God. What does my Marjub say?"

Marjub looked down sorrowfully. "Must we then forsake our father?" said he. "Would it not be better for you to make the beautiful doctrine of Jesus Christ known to father and all the other people of our Juneh? Yet no — they might perhaps kill you. — I will first tell them myself all you

have taught us, and then you can come and baptize us all."

Perecinski was silent for a while; then he replied: "That would certainly be very beautiful. But do you think your father and the men of the Juneh, who never pronounce the name of Christ but with contempt, would renounce their old superstition suddenly at your word? I think, Mara is right. We will escape together."

"Let me at least try Malek and my father," urged the boy. "Brak-ok and the others will not indeed believe me, but my father and brother will. If they will not, then I promise to run away with you and Mara."

The Pole could not mistake the noble impulse which actuated the boy. And although he felt convinced that this plan had very little prospect of success — nay, that it threatened, not only his own safety, but must also render the previously arranged plan still more difficult, if not impossible — yet he would not hinder the boy from making such a well meant experiment.—As regarded himself, he generously made the sacrifice of his life. But Usban-ok would make it impossible for the children to visit him again,

or go away with him. He considered therefore whether it would not be better to baptize them at once. But he decided that it would be better not to. So he taught them instead how they could baptize each other in case of need; gave them further instruction about the teaching of Jesus Christ; taught them to make acts of sorrow and contrition for sin; prayed with them; and only let them go when the shades of evening were closing over the wild rocky scene. A strange feeling came over him. He could scarcely bear to separate himself from the children. He made the sign of the cross over them once more, and called after them as they departed: "Pray devoutly to Mary!"

"Yes," said Mara, "we are really her children now."

X.

Temptations.

Mara and Marjub walked together in silence to the Juneh. They were thinking of all the truths which they had heard during the day which was now fading over the mountains. At last Mara said: "I wish I was already a child of God! I am afraid father will never let us become Christians, or go to the good Pole any more."

"Then I will make you a child of God, and you shall make me one," answered Marjub. "He taught us how we could baptize one another. But I still think we shall be able to persuade father and Malek to become children of God too. Courage! Mara; nobody shall ever force us to commit sin."

"No, Marjub; for that would grieve the dear Savior who was crucified for us. But if father will not permit us to be made children of God, we shall not commit a sin if we disobey him, shall we?"

"Certainly not! He has no right to command us to do what would be a sin, and the Pole told us, we must obey God rather than men."

While the children talked thus together, they were crossing the very rock on which Brak-ok had lain in hiding the whole day. He saw them coming, and he heard every word they said. He immediately resolved to try to surprise them into telling him where the Pole was; and Marjub had only just answered Mara, when there was a rustling in the bushes that grew on the sharp ledge of the rock, and the Abkasian stood before them. Mara shrieked from fear, and Marjub also was much startled; but he recovered himself quickly and said: "Why, Brak-ok! I thought you were on the Elbruz!"

"Before I go there I have a word to say to the Pole whom you have just left. So tell me directly where I can find him."

Marjub at once suspected that the man meant no good. So he answered calmly: "We won't tell you that, Brak-ok."

"You know it then?" cried the Abkasian, with glittering eyes. "You shall tell me!

Be quick about it or—" and he caught hold of the boy's arm.

"Even if you beat me, I will not tell you! No, *I will not!*" answered Marjub.

"You, at least will tell me, little Mara! I will bring you a pretty veil made of silver threads, and a golden circlet. Look here! I must know where the Pole is. I dreamt last night that he was to show me the way up the Elbruz."

"Don't trust him, Mara!" cried Marjub. "He wants to kill him."

"Don't be afraid, I won't tell him!"

"What! you won't? Wait a bit, I will teach you to be obstinate!" With these words the Abkasian drew his sabre out of its sheath and brandished it over the girl's head.

"Marjub, he is killing me!" shrieked Mara. "Oh, if I were only baptized!"

"He shall not kill you," said Marjub clinging on tightly to Brak-ok's arm so that the man could not make use of his weapon. "Run, Mara, and tell father if he kills me!"

Gnashing his teeth with rage, the Abkasian tried to get away from the boy. But hard as he struggled, he could not free

himself. Mara ran meanwhile to the nearest Juneh, crying out loudly for help. Brak-ok saw that he could not gain his end in this way, so he called to the little girl to stop, and said to the boy: "Let go of me; I promise by the beard of my father not to harm you."

Marjub released his arm at once, and stepped back a pace. "Obstinate boy!" said Brak-ok, casting an evil look on him. "Do you think, I shall not find out for myself where the Pole is, now that I know he is somewhere over there in the hollow of the rock? Go to the Juneh and tell your father that you dared to help him to escape from a just punishment! I congratulate you on the whipping you will get."

With these words Brak-ok left the children, and went towards the hollow, by the path along which they had just passed. Marjub was speechless and Mara, who had returned to him, wept as they looked after the morose and sullen looking man.

"If we could only warn the good Pole," said Marjub. "Brak-ok means no good. But he will never be able to find the hut

to-night; for it must be quite dark in the hollow now. Don't cry, Mara!"

The little sister brushed away the tears from her eyes and answered: "May the Mother of God protect him from that wicked man! But, Marjub! I do wish we had run away with him. Father will beat us and shut us up. Would it not be better if we ran away now?"

"Alone? Where to? No, Mara, we will go bravely home and tell father everything. Then if he will not be a Christian, we will run away, the first opportunity. What we may have to suffer in the meantime, we will bear patiently and think of our dear Lord who suffered so much for us."

"Yes, Marjub! and of the good children the Pole told us about, who allowed themselves to be tortured and put to death."

"So we will!" said the boy. And the children went on hand in hand back to the Juneh.

Usban-ok had asked several times after the children during the day, and had scolded Nana and Murkos for not looking after them better. When Murkos told him, just as it was getting dark, that the children had

come home, he sent for them at once. "Where have you been idling about the whole day long?" said he angrily.

"We have been to see the Pole, whom Brak-ok and the others wanted to kill on the day of the feast," answered Marjub.

"Been to see the Pole!" cried Usban-ok opening his eyes very wide. "Is he still living, and hanging about here? — as a spy most likely?"

"Yes, father, he is still alive. Mara and I loosed his bonds and set him free that day when Brak-ok and the other men wanted to kill him. You and Marjom did not want him to be killed. And we have taken him some bread and cheese and a little dried mutton every day. I should have told you sooner, father, but I was afraid the men of the Juneh might do him harm. If I have not acted rightly, punish me father, but Mara is innocent, she only did as I told her."

The boy's candid speech did not fail to make a good impression on Usban-ok. His son's brave deed pleased him; but, on the other hand, it made him really very angry that he, and all the men of the Juneh should have been deceived by the children. So he

said: "Of course you deserve to be punished; but you shall be forgiven if you promise never to go again to see the Pole who despised our sacrifice. Besides, what can he want here? to be a spy upon us, and betray us to the enemy?"

"You wrong him, father. He is a good man, and he has been very kind to us. He pointed out to Mara and me the right way to Heaven and he will show you also. Let me tell you what he taught us." The boy related in simple language, the principal points of the Christian doctrine. Usban-ok listened with ill-restrained wrath. At last he asked: "What then are our sacrifices which we offer up to the great Tha-Nan?"

"Superstition and idolatry!" said the boy.

"And what are we? What were our forefathers?"

"In error, father."

"What will you be after the Pole has washed you with this magical water?"

"A Christian."

Usban-ok could contain himself no longer. "Shame on you!" he broke out; "shame on your seducer! He shall answer with his life for having tried to draw you

away from the faith of your ancestors! Has he baptized you yet?"

"No, we have not been baptized yet, but we are going to be."

"Rather would I see you dead at my feet! Murkos! take these traitors and bind them fast to two posts in the stable; whip them every morning and evening till they lose all desire of being Christians; and I hold you responsible with your life for their safe custody. We will catch the Pole to-morrow. They themselves shall show us where he is hidden."

XI.

The Russians come.

Usban-ok's plan for apprehending the Pole against whom he was so much incensed, was unexpectedly frustrated on the following morning.

In the middle of the night a messenger came from Naib,—the prince whose acquaintance we made in the beginning of our story,—with the news that the Russians had advanced from the north, and requested that a council be held forthwith. Usban-ok had his people at once summoned and the horses saddled. A great fire in the middle of the court-yard lighted up the busy crowd of men who were packing provisions and war material on beasts of burden, testing the sharpness of their swords; loading guns; fastening saddle-girths and fixing bridles in the utmost hurry and excitement.

"The Russians will soon have reached the sepulchre in Ibi-hollow," said the messenger.

"If they advance to the three rocks, beneath which Sheik Zam-ok lies buried, our home is lost," said Malek to old Murkos.

"Yes, there is an old prophecy to that effect which I heard when I was a child," answered Murkos. "Ride off quickly and lose no time!"

"What is my father waiting for?" said Malek.

"He has just gone to the children who are bound in the stable," said Murkos. "He had them well beaten last night, but it has not done any good. I knew Marjub was as obstinate as a mule; but that Mara also should endure to be beaten till the blood ran rather than give in, I should not have believed possible. The Pole must have bewitched the children, but I will make him pay for it when I catch him!"

Usban-ok had in fact gone to the stable, where the two children lay on the hard straw bound with cords and aching in every limb from the cruel punishment they had undergone. When they saw their father coming they feared some new suffering was in store for them, and they lifted up their hands to him imploringly.

"Have you come to your senses yet?" said the father, — "No? — Well, so much the worse for you — I will soon conquer your obstinacy. I am going off at once, with all the men of the Juneh to meet the Russians. Marjub, you have shown that in spite of your youth, you possess courage and prudence. If you obey me I will let you go with us."

"O father, I will obey you in all that is right. Let me go with you to fight against the Russians!"

"Will you be true to the faith of your forefathers, and give up all this nonsense about Christianity?"

That was a very severe temptation for Marjub. What a joy it would have been for him to go with his father, armed with a sword and a rifle, to meet the enemy! — He was silent for a moment, and Mara was beginning to fear her brother would give way, when Marjub said in a tremulous voice: "I dare not, father!"

Usban-ok uttered a curse, and gave the boy a cut with his riding-whip. Then he called old Nana to him and said: "They are both to remain tied up here, and have

only bread and water till my return. The Pole has bewitched them; but I will drag him here, at my horse's tail, when I lay hold of him; and make him take off the spell."

A few minutes afterwards the children heard the horsemen leave the Juneh, cracking their long whips as they rode away. Daylight was breaking over the snow-capped Elbruz whilst the darkness of night still prevailed in the ravine. As the horsemen reached the nearest hills, a man, who had evidently been resting under the shelter of an old fir tree, stood up and went towards Usban-ok who was riding at the head of his troop.

"Brak-ok!" cried the latter in astonishment, reining in his horse. "I thought you were far away from here on the road to the mountain."

"I was on the way there. But as I was resting under the oak tree in the filbert hollow yesterday, I fell asleep, and in a dream the old man of Elbruz appeared to me. He shook his hoary head till his long beard waved to and fro like the mane of your stead, and he said; before I went up

to him I must slay the Pole who was bewitching the children of Usban-ok. So I dare not venture up to him on the Elbruz, until I take with me the head of the Pole. Help me to catch the enchanter, who has hidden himself somewhere down there in the hollows of the rock."

Usban-ok and his people naturally believed Brak-ok's story; for the Abkasians are very superstitious and place great faith in dreams. They were therefore quite ready to undertake a systematic search for the Pole. Usban-ok was just giving his orders when a second messenger, mounted on a horse all covered with foam, reached the top of the pass, and urged them to hurry on, saying: "Quick! quick, noble Usban-ok! The Russians are not three miles distant from the sepulchre of Sheik Zam-ok; and if the gallant Naib does not soon get help, he will not be able to hold out against the overwhelming odds. If we can only succeed in detaining the enemy a couple of days in the pass, we shall get help. Notice has already come that the Pasha's troops have landed together with some Poles, who have artillery

with them. We hope to get them to the front within two days."

"Forward then!" shouted Usban-ok. "The Pole will not escape you. Hunger must soon force him out of his hiding-place. Lie in wait for him, and take his head to the old man of the Elbruz."

The mountain was now shining in the first rays of the morning sun. The Abkasians looked upon this as a lucky omen, and pushed on towards the valley. Brak-ok descended into the ravine, which he had crossed in the evening's twilight, and began a strict search as soon as daylight permitted. But he failed to find anything. Perecinski had seen him, and recognized him at once as the son-in-law of Usban-ok, who had drawn his sword in such a threatening manner on the day of the feast. It was quite clear to the Pole that the Abkasian was searching for him; and he concluded that this was the result of the courageous conduct of the children in presence of their father. "When he finds nothing up there, he will search this bank on his way back, and will discover the hut."

In all haste, he removed every trace which

might betray his presence, and then climbed noiselessly up into the thick branches of the fir which spread its sheltering foliage over the hut. He had had barely time to secret himself in a safe hiding-place from which he could watch the entrance, when he heard the Abkasian already approaching. In a few moments he was standing before the entrance. Then Perecinski watched him, loading his rifle and unsheathing his scimitar, creep into the hut. The Pole thanked his guardian angel that he had seen the Abkasian coming. Brak-ok ventured very cautiously, holding himself ready for defence if attacked, to enter the interior hut. Finding the place empty, he retreated and lay down opposite the entrance concealed behind a shrub. Evidently he was convinced he had found the Pole's hiding place, and was waiting for him to return.

The Pole was watching all this. What would become of him if his enemy persisted in waiting till hunger and thirst compelled him to leave his place of concealment? If he had only run away at once! Hour after hour passed slowly on. The hot August sun rose higher and higher and then sank

towards the horizon. Still the Abkasian sat watching, rifle in hand. The Pole exhausted and tormented with thirst, clung to the trunk of the tree. The children had, to-day, for the first time, omitted coming. "What can have happened?" he asked himself; "and how long shall I be able to hold out here?" The sun went down; twilight came on; and as long as his sight permitted him to see through the ever increasing darkness, he observed the Abkasian clinging obstinately to his post.

Usban-ok and his troop had in the meantime made good progress and by evening they reached the sepulchre in the Ibi-hollow, the three gigantic rocks, around which blazed the campfires of the mountaineers, who at the call of Prince Naib had hurried from all parts of the mountains to resist the advance of the enemy through the pass. The danger was great; for the Russians far outnumbered the Abkasians. Besides the mountaineers had exhausted nearly all their ammunition. What Usban-ok had taken with him was at once shared amongst them. It might last for one more day. Then, if

no help came, the fate of the mountaineers was decided.

On the same evening Marjub and Mara, who were still lying bound in the stable, prayed fervently to the Blessed Virgin for help and rescue. "See, dear Mother, how it is with thy children!" cried Mara. "Old Murkos has just beaten us; the good Pole is pursued by the wicked Brak-ok; our father and brother are gone off to the war; when they come back they will turn us out of the Juneh homeless and destitute; and if they do not come back, and the Russians are victorious, what will become of us then? O dearest Mother, remember that we are thy children!"

XII.

The Crisis.

Three days had passed since the events related above.

Old Murkos was seated in front of the enclosure of Usban-ok's Juneh smoking his pipe in the twilight, with the servant who had been left behind with him to take care of the homestead.

"I wonder how it is," said he, "that no messenger has brought us news of the battle. I have not heard the cannon's roar since this morning; whereas the whole of the day yesterday they re-echoed in the mountain pass and in our lonely valley."

"The Russians must have retreated and our people be pursuing them;" remarked the man. "I wish I was there; but riding is painful to me ever since one of those blood-thirsty fellows sent a bullet through my thigh.—I wish it had gone clean through his skull!"

"I don't like it, though, that no messenger comes;" said Murkos shaking his head, and he smoked his pipe again in silence as he looked towards the mountain pass by which lay the road to the nearest Juneh.

All at once a lurid light burst forth over the neighboring valley, and streamed up into the heavens. "What is that?" cried both together as they quickly rose and left the homestead.

"That light can't be from the sun," said Murkos, "for the top of Elbruz is plunged in darkness."

"I really think old Marjom's Juneh is on fire;" rejoined his companion. "Can it be an accident? or has the enemy done it?"

The men stood at the gate of the Juneh not knowing what to do, and looked towards the valley, which was being more and more lighted up by the increasing glare of the flames.

Suddenly a trooper in full speed galloped up. "It is Malek!" cried Murkos. "But good God! look how he sways about in the saddle and clutches tight hold of the horse's mane!"

It was indeed Malek, who could only

keep himself in the saddle with great effort, and actually fell into the old man's arms as soon as he reached the Juneh. "You are wounded!" cried Murkos. "What has happened?"

"All is lost," said Malek, "Treason! Flight!"

Murkos supported the wounded man against the Juneh fence, and ran to the neighboring brook to get some water to moisten his parched lips and bathe his temples. Then he said: "Treason?—Have the Poles betrayed us?"

The youth recovered himself a little; then shaking his head said: "Not the Poles. They fought bravely; our young Pole too! No, it was Hadschi, the treacherous hound who sells both friend and foe, who showed the Russians a way across the rock, and thus enabled them to surround us, There was no use in fighting after that. Our people are nearly all dead. Father fell at my side! Only a few of us were able to cut our way through, and they are now wandering about in the hills. Ah, how dark it is getting! Murkos, it is all over with me! Lay me down here on the bank of the stream and

let me die. Save the people of the Juneh and my father's treasures. Marjom's huts are already burning. Quick!—save—flee —they are coming!"

Murkos seeing that the dying man, was beyond the reach of help, sorrowfully carried out his wishes. He signaled to his companion and between them they carried him and placed him under shelter on the brink of the stream, and the youth, who was mortally wounded, soon became unconscious.

"His spirit is going to the hero spirits of our people," said Murkos, and a tear fell on to his grey beard. "We must now see how we and the women can escape from the enemy."

The two men overcome with grief hurried into the Juneh. The women, who as soon as it was dark had retired into one of the huts to spin, uttered heartrending cries when they heard that their beloved master was dead, and the enemy approaching. For a few minutes the Juneh resounded with sobs and lamentations. Then Murkos prevailed on them in all haste to collect the clothes and valuables; the gold, precious stones, and beautiful weapons. And hardly

had half an hour passed since the arrival of the dying Malek, when the fugitives, under the guidance of the old servant of the Juneh, hastily made their escape, and—under cover of the darkness—retired into the higher and more inaccessible parts of the mountains.

In the midst of the hurry and confusion, no one had thought of the two children; and not a soul had entered the stable where they were bound; for in that forsaken nook there were neither clothes nor treasures to save. Marjub and Mara heard the cry of distress plainly. The boy said: "Bad news of our troops must have been received;" but the children did not suspect the full meaning of it. Then, when all around was quiet again, they prayed together, and fell asleep. How long they slept they knew not; but suddenly they were awakened by a loud noise. Rough men's voices were speaking in a tongue unknown to the children.

"Mara," said the boy after listening attentively, "I think it is the Russians!"

"O dear! what ever will become of us?" said the little girl.

"Hush, hide yourself under the straw;—I can hear footsteps."

The children had scarcely had time to conceal themselves when the stable door was pushed open and two bearded Cossacks entered with a torch.

"Quite empty!" said one of the men to his companion. "There is nothing to be got here. We must go over to the huts, where those dogs of Abkasians lived, if we want to find anything worth having."

"The birds are flown;" replied the other with a curse. "At all events we will burn down the nest." So saying they left the stable.

The children did not understand the conversation, but a dreadful suspicion came into the boy's mind.

"Mara," said he to his little sister, "I think our people must have either run away or been killed, and the enemy has taken possession of the Juneh. I have always heard that the Russians burn down the homesteads they take by storm but drive away all the cattle. I am afraid they will burn our Juneh down too. Look, what a light comes in through the cracks of the door!"

"O dear, O dear!" moaned the little girl. "They have set fire to father's house! Very soon the other huts will be ablaze too, and then the stable also, and we shall be burnt to death."

The children heard the enemy withdraw, shrieking and shouting; and soon after the crackling and roaring of the flames was unmistakably heard. "We will call out for help;" said Marjub; "even the Russians will have pity on us, and will not let us be burnt to death."

"Ah, Marjub, if we were only baptized! If you had only agreed to run away with me and the good Pole!"

"I meant well, Mara, and God will not forsake us. We are now in danger of death; and I would baptize you, as the good Pole taught us to do, if I could only reach the water pitcher which Murkos placed behind the door. Stay, I will try once more whether I cannot get the straps off my hands."

The boy tried with all his strength to burst asunder the leathern straps which bound his hands, and although he did not succeed in doing that, he managed to loosen them somewhat, and succeeded at length in

releasing one hand, although it was very much swollen. He now tried to undo the rope which was knotted round his body and fastened to a post at a distance of four or five feet.

In the meantime the flames, fanned by a strong wind, made furious progress. One after another the huts caught fire — blazed fiercely — then fell in with a crash, as the burning rafters gave way — and myriads of glowing sparks burst from the fiery ruins up into the reddened sky — and then fell in showers to the earth again. Long tongues of lurid flame leaped up — blazed for a moment as they devoured some new material, and then as suddenly subsided. Soon the whole Juneh was one mighty conflagration; and the glare of the devouring flames lighted up the lonely mountain valley with a brightness equal to day.

Marjub had just succeeded in loosening the cord which bound him to the post when the first sparks fell upon the dry thatched roof of the stable and set it on fire. A burning heat and suffocating smoke, impelled by the wind soon filled the place. Marjub rushed forward to untie his little

sister's bonds; but she said to him implor-ingly: "Baptize me first, brother, and then we will flee. But if you cannot loosen the cord, then do you escape alone, and leave me here!"

Mara fell on her knees in prayer, Marjub hastily seizing the water jug, said to his little sister: "You believe in God the Father who created us, and in Jesus Christ who redeemed us, and in the Holy Ghost who makes us children of God?"

"I do believe!"

Then Marjub lifted up the jug and poured the water on the little girl's forehead as he said slowly and distinctly: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

"Now I will gladly die," said Mara, "for I am a child of God. Flee, Marjub, you will never be able to undo the cord. Run, the roof is on fire!"

"First baptize me, and we will see what can be done. Take the handle of the pitcher. I believe in Almighty God, and in all that He has revealed! Now pour the water on my head and pronounce, at the same time, the words of holy Baptism."

So saying he bowed down his head, that even with her fettered hands, Mara might be able to baptize him. In a moment it was done.—The little sister pronounced the words of Baptism as the waters of salvation flowed over her brother's brow.

Both were now children of God, and their joy was so full that for a moment they forgot their ever increasing danger. The roof above them was on fire — the heat was stifling — and the place was full of smoke. Marjub trembling in every limb, tried hard to undo the cords which bound his sister whilst she was imploring him to flee. With all his efforts he could not succeed; and bursting into tears he called upon God and the Blessed Virgin, and their guardian angels to help them in their dire distress. He was beginning to feel the stupifying effects of the smoke under which Mara was already sinking fast, when he again called out loudly for help. It seemed to him as if he heard some one answer from a distance. Could it be so? or was it merely an effect of the imagination? —The place began to swim round, and he sank unconscious to the ground by the side of his sister.

Marjub was not deceived. It was Perecinski who had heard the boy's last cry for help; and, led by it, he rushed into the burning stable with the courage of despair. Instantly he snatched up the unconscious children, and bore them through the smoke and fire, safely into the open air. Five minutes later their rescue would have been impossible. Just as he reached the edge of the stream which was only a few hundred paces away, the roof of the stable fell in.

We will now leave Perecinski with the rescued children to care for and attend to in their suffering state, whilst we briefly relate what befell him from the time of his concealment, when the Abkasian was seeking for him and his sudden and timely appearance on the scene of the destructive fire. He succeeded under the shadow of night in getting away from the tree near which Brak-ok sat watching for him, and escaped out of the ravine. He made his way through dense woodlands towards the hills, and wandered about for a whole day. Overcome by hunger and fatigue he despaired of ever reaching the sea coast, when to his great surprise he heard the sound of his native

language. It came from a detachment of Polish troops who were marching to the assistance of the Abkasians. Gladly he joined them; and he fought in their ranks at the sepulchre. When Hadschi Keranduk's treachery enabled the Russians to surround them, he cut his way through, and hurried to the Juneh of Usban-ok, whom he had seen fall, and who, when dying, had begged of him to save his children. He feared he could never be in time for he had seen the Cossacks on the road to the Juneh in advance of him; and before he had climbed the heights of the mountain pass, he saw the glare of the burning homestead. But an inward voice still urged him on and he came, as we have seen, just at the right moment to snatch the children from the flames.

The traitor Hadschi and his accomplice Brak-ok received their deserts soon after the defeat. As Brak-ok did not succeed in finding the Pole, it occured to him that the head of one of those who had fallen in the battle would bring him in the hundred roubles just as well as that of Perecinski, whom neither Hadschi nor the commander of the Russian outpost had ever seen. So

he carried to Hadschi the head of a young Russian noble in a leather bag. And as they mutually distrusted each other, they both went to the nearest frontier fort to receive the Judas money. In a moment the Russian commander recognized the head of the pretended deserter as that of a young man who had been an intimate friend of his. So he made short work of them both, and ordered Hadschi and Brak-ok to be hanged on the nearest tree.

Perecinski, in company with the two children, made his way in safety to the little harbor of Toab on the coast. There his own and the children's adventures were made known to the Polish authorities who permitted them to travel by the next ship to Trebizond. Whilst Perecinski accompanied by a Polish officer, whose recommendation obtained for him a situation with a rich fellow-countryman in Constantinople, was on his journey thither, Mara and Marjub, now Mary and Martin, remained with a Capuchin Missionary in Trebizond, and prepared themselves with great fervor for their first Communion. Perecinski could not, of course, go back to his own country,

so he formed a new home for himself in America, and sent for his dear old mother to go and live with him. But when he wrote to Trebizond to invite the children also to share his home, he received an answer that the children of Mary had been already taken by our dear Lord to their true home in Heaven.

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